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West Virginia Commissioner of Immigration reports

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Annual report of the Commissioner of Immigration of the State of West Virginia, <2nd (1865), 1867, 7th (1870), 8th (1872)>

Report of the Commissioner of Immigration for West Virginia, <1866>

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRATION.

OF THE
STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

FOR THE YEAR 1865.



WHEELING:
JOHN FREW, PUBLIC PRINTER.

1866.

REPORT.

To His Excellency A. I. BOREMAN,
Governor of West Virginia:

In compliance with the provisions of an act of the Legislature, passed March 2d, 1864, for the encouragement of immigration to this State, I have the honor to submit my second annual report.

At the date of my last report, our country was still involved in a civil war of uncertain duration, and the necessities of military recruitment here, had engendered in Europe an almost invincible prejudice against all American agencies for the inducement of emigration. Since then, I am happy to say, this obstacle to the success of my official efforts has been entirely removed. In addition to the unimpeded circulation of several thousand printed documents in furtherance of my mission, our official enterprise has enjoyed the benefit of frequent and favorable notices from the European press. In every case where the good faith of our undertaking was satisfactorily ascertained, active co-operation was most cheerfully extended to it, and I may frankly add, that my success in regard to practical results was only limited by the means at my command.

IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS.

From reliable indications, the European immigration for the year 1866 is expected to be unusually large. At least a proportionate share of the influx is destined to West Virginia, and will open a new era in her history. The similarity of our soil and climate to that of the most favored regions of Switzerland and Germany, appear to have so decisively impressed the people of those countries, that I have been requested to look out for suitable territory whereupon to locate their advance colonies.

In my communication to your Excellency, under date of 1st of October last, I suggested the propriety of making systematic preparation for immigration in our State; where, outside of our principal towns, scarcely any foreign nucleus exists, to serve as a guiding light or rallying point for new comers. The expediency of such measures was lately confirmed by correspondents in official position,

assuring me that whenever lands are surveyed and prepared in conformity with the plan suggested by me, and their settlement superintended by the Commissioner of Immigration, such colonies will be made the subject of special recommendation by the public authorities of the mother countries.

Since the triumphant vindication of our national Union, the grandeur and power of our unrivaled country have silenced the voice of detraction abroad, and emigration to the United States is gaining so rapidly in public opinion, that the governments who formerly opposed it, deem it incumbent now to guide and protect the current which they can no longer resist.

IMPORTANCE OF ROADS.

While no doubt remains of our approaching success in establishing pioneer colonies from Europe in the most accessible portions of our State, and in introducing a large supply of skilled labor among us, several important improvements will have to be accomplished before immigration will flow here on a scale commensurate with our wants and resources. The most desirable class of settlers do not regard the quality and low price of lands in the interior counties as an adequate compensation for the insufficiency of our roads, and the cost and distance of wagon transportation forms a decisive item in their calculation. In this respect even many of the western states enjoy a superior advantage over us, and Illinois, with her railway net of 4,000 miles, most deservedly so. A popular writer on emigration, and former U. S. Consul in Europe, in reply to my application for advice and co-operation, says in substance: "Let your State keep up a well appointed immigration agency, advertise freely, make railroads in every direction, and the people will come."

It has been repeatedly asserted by statistical authorities, that West Virginia is susceptible of a paying-railroad system, equal at least, to that of Massachusetts, and a comparison of the natural resources of the two States, census in hand, amply confirms the calculation. While our State presents a much more extensive fertile area for the production of food and raw materials, and an unfathomed supply of the minerals most essential to the industrial arts, our coast of 300 miles on a branch of the largest fluvial artery of the continent, and our proximity to the Atlantic markets by rail, assign to West Virginia a no less brilliant commercial destiny. Foreign capitalists and men of enterprise, familiar with the main-springs of public prosperity, can trace on the map of our State every line of rail and river improvement which the development of our fields, mines and forests will eventually call into life, but our

own people are so confident that the construction of those works is only a question of time, that they unfortunately neglect to put their own shoulders to the wheel.

Not only our rail and river communications, but our turnpike and county road system also requires further legislative attention to make it what it should be. The central and south-western counties especially, are mainly dependent upon county subscriptions for the construction and repair of turnpikes, since the system of State subscription under which the other sections obtained their improvements is discountenanced by constitutional provision. Considering that the counties referred to are at the same time the least favored in point of population, the rate of self-taxation necessary to build up their most indispensable roads operates with disproportionate hardship upon them.

I trust that my remarks upon this subject will not be deemed irrelevant, when I add that they are irrepressibly suggested to me by every inquiry from other states and countries in regard to the prospects of West Virginia.

WASTE LANDS AND REVALUATION.

Another serious impediment to the growth of our population, consists in the neglected condition of many large tracts of land in the Great Kanawha, Guyandotte and Sandy valleys, which, I believe, are principally owned by non-residents. These properties extend through one of the most genial sections of the State, admirably adapted to the cheap rearing of live stock, replete with valuable minerals, and are not assessed at one-tenth of their simple agricultural value. In many instances the title is involved or imperfect, but as the lands were acquired years ago at a mere nominal price, and taxation is no burden, the owners appear content to hold them up with a speculative view to the future. It is believed that a judicious revaluation of lands throughout the State would compel these foreign holders to regulate their boundaries and titles, and induce some disposition of their lands more conducive to the prosperity of the State.

LAND COMPANIES.

I beg leave, also, to call the attention of your Excellency to the questionable expediency of that section of our corporation laws, prohibiting joint-stock companies from buying and selling land for profit. The purchase and colonization of extensive tracts in our State, requiring a large outlay of capital, emphatically belong to a class of enterprises in which association is most desirable. The only objection urged against land-holding stock companies, is the danger from combination and monopoly, which, however, is

supposed to be purely imaginary. In our days of matter-of-fact speculation, corporations are not organized for the purpose of making investments for future generations, but with a view to sure profits and quick returns. Individuals desirous of investing for more remote purposes, can do so better without than with the aid of association, and the history of Virginia lands conclusively shows that from this class of speculators, and not from stock companies, the hoarding up of land, fatal to the growth of communities, is to be apprehended.

If danger from corporations really exists, these organizations can be readily subjected to the control of the Legislature, by provisions similar to those of House Bill No. 66, session of 1864, which the adjournment of the Legislature prevented from coming to a vote.

IMMIGRATION OF 1864 AND 1865.

The number of immigrants landed in the United States in 1864 was something over 200,000. The influx of 1865 exceeded 184,000 on the 8th of December last, for the port of New York alone. The aggregate for all the ports of the Union has probably reached 220,000 by the 31st of December.

I have endeavored to ascertain how many immigrants had reached our State during the last two years, but there being no means of record provided as yet, I have not been able to arrive at correct figures. I believe, however, that 2,000 will cover the immigration to West Virginia, from the ports of New York, Baltimore and Philadelphia. Of these but few are landed settlers, the greater number consisting of single persons of both sexes, journeymen mechanics, laborers and domestic help. From other States of the Union at least twice that number have settled among us, and are composed of farmers, merchants, artisans and laborers, the two latter classes chiefly engaged in the development of coal and petroleum, and in other mechanical pursuits attendant upon such enterprises.

Our loss of population consequent upon the sale of numerous homesteads for mineral purposes is by no means as large as might be supposed. Many of those who sold under those circumstances have purchased and settled again within the limits of the State, while probably not less than one-half of those who emigrated to the prairie states, were compelled to return to their native hills, by sickness and death in their families.

EXPENDITURES.

By the appended account of my office, it will be seen that since my appointment, March 3d, 1864, I have received from private

subscription \$480 00, and by legislative appropriation \$300 00—in all \$780 00, and that my official expenditures up to date amount to \$1,061 40, leaving a deficit of \$281 40, advanced by myself and other parties. Much the greater portion of these expenditures were made in Europe, while gold and foreign exchange ranged from 140 to 220.

The above amount was principally absorbed by the printing, shipping and distributing, by mail or otherwise, of 8,000 copies of an eight page pamphlet, descriptive of our State, in the English and German languages; 380 copies of our State Constitution; about 600 other public documents, and as many newspapers containing articles on West Virginia; 40 maps of the State and 5000 official cards; by advertisements here and in Europe; stationery, and the postage on nearly 600 letters, 428 of which were written by myself in three different languages, two-thirds of the latter number being directed to Europe. For upwards of fifty newspaper articles, editorials and correspondence, published in Europe through the influence of friends, I have, up to date, incurred no expense.

None of the expenditures of my sojourn at the Atlantic ports during last year are charged in my official account, although much of my time was devoted there to the practical duties of my mission. In future, however, some allowance will be required for traveling expenses, the President of the B. & O. R. R. having, for reasons not stated, failed to renew my free pass over the roads of that company, which I had used to the amount of \$80 00 since June, 1864. The company have probably come to the conclusion that immigration to West Virginia must necessarily pass over their road, independently of any courtesy extended to our Commissioner.

URGENCY OF AN APPROPRIATION.

While I cheerfully waive all claims against the State Treasury for personal services, it is evident from the amount of labor performed, that I have placed myself under obligation to a number of friends and correspondents for practical assistance, which in some instances was rendered gratuitously, and in others calls for prompt if not adequate remuneration.

It will be remembered that the act of March 2d, 1864, omitted to make any appropriation to carry out its purposes. The issue of our civil war, and even the permanency of our young State, were then matters of considerable doubt with many of our Legislators, who were evidently abashed by the uncertainty of events. No average body of citizens, elected to legislate for the development of a rising commonwealth, would, from ignorance or prejudice,

overlook the most important condition of public prosperity—*population*. West Virginia, in comparison with many less favored States of Europe, could support a thriving population of 4,000,000, or 160 to the square mile. If this figure is reduced one-half for the sake of elbow-room, we are still more than 1,600,000 behind our quota. If this were filled, what would be the condition of the State and its public treasury compared with present circumstances?

While an integral part of the "Old Dominion," we never ceased to complain, among the rest, of the industrial stagnation imposed upon us by the misrule of sectional partiality. What will be thought of our sincerity, if now, free and powerful, we refuse to do for ourselves that which we claimed as a right in the days of our weakness and subjection? Even old Virginia, our former step-mother, is now making more spirited efforts to recover power and wealth through the attraction of population, than her emancipated daughter. Before the smoke of battle had fairly cleared away from her war-trodden fields, her people, prompted by the simple dictate of self-preservation, without official assistance, organized agencies in London and elsewhere, which are now sending forth, at a heavy expense, skill, labor and capital sufficient to obliterate the ravages of war from her surface, before we make up our minds to follow her example. From my knowledge of European prejudices against the social status of labor in the South, I had thought this an impossibility a few months ago. I was greatly mistaken. Where there is a will there is a way, and the present flow of immigration to the Southern States is but the result of appropriate means and influence expended at the right spot.

The rapid growth of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri and Illinois is chiefly promoted by the continual and liberal maintenance of agencies, whose fingerboards and advertisements meet the eye of the emigrant at every station of his journey. Wisconsin, when financially much weaker than West Virginia, salaried a Commissioner of Immigration and assistants, at the port of New York, at the rate of \$10,000 per annum. Illinois is even now expending upwards of \$50,000 per annum. Part of this outlay is borne by her Central R. R. Co., whose sales during the last year, chiefly to European settlers, amount to 275,000 acres, and for the last ten years to 1,400,000 acres.

A large and valuable portion of West Virginia is still in much greater need of promotion to public attention, than either of the States above mentioned. Our central, south-western and mountain counties are entirely dependent upon an increase of population and capital, not only for their material advancement, but to some

extent for the stability of the new order of things among them. They have neither the cities, towns, railroads, turnpikes, schools, nor the mineral, agricultural and manufactural development of the other sections, and public economy, no less than a just policy, suggest the prevention of sectional jealousy, by the equalization of those advantages through the promptest available means.

WEST VIRGINIA AT THE UNIVERSAL EXHIBITION OF 1867.

For this purpose an unprecedented and most fortunate opportunity is now afforded to our young commonwealth by the Universal Exposition to be held at Paris, the capital of France, in 1867, where the natural, industrial and artistical productions of the whole globe are to be represented. This exhibition, which by the vastness of its conception and purposes, will eclipse all its predecessors, may be practically regarded as a convention of all nations, to compare notes on their resources and appliances for the happiness and advancement of the human race. In order to secure the full benefit to be derived from this grand pageant of universal progress, many exhibiting nations, especially of Europe, will be represented there by delegations not only of their leading talents in every branch of art and science, but also of farmers, mechanics, miners, artisans; and laborers from the humblest ranks of industrial pursuits. Whatever our State may exhibit there, from a perfected steam engine to a handful of native soil, will be noticed, examined, analyzed and compared by millions of inquiring and intelligent visitors. The information there acquired will be disseminated and discussed alike in the cabinets of the financial princes, at whose fiat continents are connected by iron bands, and in the remotest cottages of the sons of toil, whose dreams of comfort and independence are inseparably associated with emigration to our happy land.

When the circular of the State Department, inviting American exhibition, was first received in our State, in October last, it was apparent that very few of our citizens would be prepared to send in their applications for space, and specifications, by the first of this month, as required. Understanding, however, from the press and public rumor, that there was a general desire to see West Virginia represented, I concluded that in the absence of initiative steps from any other quarter, the preliminary action in the matter legitimately reverted to my Department. After receiving the approbation of your Excellency, I published in nearly all the papers of the State, a synopsis of the purposes and arrangement of the Exposition, with other information indispensable to persons contemplating exhibition. Not having learned, up to a late hour, whether applications had been made to the U. S. Agent at New

York by private individuals of our State, I secured for my official contribution as Commissioner of Immigration, 50 sq. metres, out of the 2605 devoted to the United States. These fifty metres are distributed among seven out of the ten groups, and among fifteen out of the ninety-five classes, into which the Exposition is subdivided, and will be occupied by the following natural, industrial and artificial productions of West Virginia, named in the order of groups and classes :

Photographs ; geographical, topographical and mineral maps ; lamps for petroleum ; gun-stocks and walking sticks ; specimens of rocks, coal, ores, earths and clays ; petroleum, crude and refined ; manufactured iron ; timber for various purposes ; wood for cabinet and furniture, for cooperage, shingles, &c. ; specimens of wood, cotton, flax, tobacco, mineral water, salts ; apparatus for boring oil wells ; views of coal and other mines ; specimens of building material ; plans of public works ; specimens of wheat, rye and Indian corn ; of maple and sorghum sugar and syrup ; wine, ale and beer ; seeds and slips or roots of fruit and forest trees.

It will be seen that my list is mainly composed of raw materials and their immediate products, these being more appropriate as a contribution from this office. I had received no intimation that manufactured articles would be furnished me for that purpose, and supposed, moreover, that manufacturers would prefer to exhibit in their own name.

It will devolve upon me to collect from every section of the State, specimens of the articles composing my list, and class, label, pack and ship the same before January 1st, 1867. These specimens should be particularly described, with reference to quality, price, origin and purpose, in a special catalogue, which will form a comprehensive exhibit of the resources of the State. This document should contain, also, an internal improvement map of West Virginia, and be printed to the extent of 20,000 copies or more, in the English, French and German languages—one-half of the latter for distribution throughout Europe. A special agent for the State, who need not necessarily rank with the U. S. Commissioners on similar missions, should be appointed to receive and display our contributions, attend the Exposition at its opening and closing, and on all other important occasions. The intervals he should employ in visiting the countries in Europe whence the most desirable class of emigrants may be obtained ; diffuse verbal and documentary information regarding our State, and make arrangements at all available points for the permanent guidance of emigration to our State, so as to effectually carry the provisions of the act of the Legislature governing the subject.

In thus connecting our participation in the Exposition with the encouragement of immigration, we invest it with a character of patriotic and practical utility, which would justify before every class of our people a much larger expenditure than that which it will involve under economical management.

It has been suggested by one of our public prints, that \$5,000 should be appropriated for this purpose. Considering the probable cost of living and travel abroad, during at least a period of nine months, and the large amount of printing and advertising connected with the project, \$5,000 in gold, or its equivalent in currency, may be sufficient to cover the expenses of the mission, provided Congress makes an appropriation for the transportation of the goods to Europe and return, and no part of this sum be devoted to the compensation of our agent. If this appropriation is made for the joint purpose of representation at the Exposition and the promotion of immigration, I respectfully suggest that one-fourth of it be paid to the Commissioner of Immigration, *first*, to balance arrears due him and others; *second*, for current expenses of 1866; and *third*, to defray the expenses of collecting, labeling and packing the State contributions to the Exposition, and preparing the catalogue of the same; and that the remaining three-fourths be placed at the disposition of the Commissioner, or such other agent as may be appointed, one month before his departure for Europe. The English portion of the catalogue edition may be printed here, those in the French and German languages can be gotten up at less cost on the other side of the Atlantic.

I have not assumed the responsibility of laying this project before your Excellency without mature consideration of its urgency, its facility of execution and important results. In so doing, I had only to follow the experience of other states, whose natural advantages are vastly inferior to those of West Virginia, and whose thousand-fold returns from investment in similar patriotic enterprises, can leave no doubt in any logical mind of the triumphant and permanent success of the proposed measure.

I have the honor to remain, most respectfully,

Your Excellency's Obedient Servant,

J. H. DISS DEBAR,

Commissioner of Immigration.

ST. CLARA COLONY, Doddridge Co., W. Va., January, 1866.